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## ABSTRACT

This speech addresses the issue of excellence and leadership in academia. The speech begins with a review of what excellence is, how it is judged, and why it is important. It is argued that educational institutions, although they strive for excellence, do not always attain it, or else they present cosmetic approaches to make it appear they've attained it, such as changing an institution's name from college to university. Six components are offered as critical in attaining academic excellence: (1) a clear institutional mission; (2) the commitment of adequate resources; (3) emphasis on the processes of teaching and learning; (4) the commitment to scholarship, creative work, and research; (5) an academic environment supporting individual excellence; and (6) strong, creative, and effective leadership. An example is given of the development of an integrated, multidisciplinary sequence of courses in Pharmacology at Ohio State University, its successful implementation, and the reasons for its eventual abandonment by the school. The lessons learned from the experience, as well as what it reveals concerning academic leadership are discussed. (GLR)

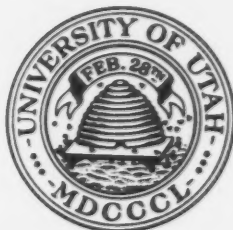
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Professor, Pharmacology and Toxicology  
University of Utah

THE 51st ANNUAL  
FREDERICK WILLIAM REYNOLDS LECTURE  
Delivered at the University of Utah  
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Frederick William Reynolds Association  
Salt Lake City, Utah

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The Annual Reynolds Lectureship at the University of Utah serves a double purpose:

First, through a distinguished member of the faculty, the University presents an important yearly offering to the public.

Second, the Lectureship commemorates in a fitting way the unique services to the University and to the State of Frederick W. Reynolds, Professor of English, and organizer and first

Director of the Extension Division.

The Committee responsible for selection of each year's speaker consists of members of the Executive Committee of the Reynolds Association and the President and Academic Vice President of the University.

The yearly presentation is a joint undertaking of the Division of Continuing Education and the Reynolds Association.

## THE REYNOLDS LECTURESHIP

"In these lectures, as the years go by, new knowledge, important subjects, and vital issues will be discussed. It is more than likely that some of these issues may be controversial in nature, about which differences of opinion and strong feeling may exist. But even upon such questions it is proposed that the speaker shall be free to approach his subject with intellectual courage and vigor and advance any ideas which he can support with facts and logic.

"It is assumed, of course, that good taste shall not be violated, that propaganda in the narrow sense shall never intrude, and that due regard to the rights and feelings of others shall always be evident. But as long as the treatment of a subject is intelligent, objective, and critical, it is assumed that the speaker shall be free to follow facts and reasoning through to their conclusion.

"If such a policy, perchance, shall change some of our beliefs then so be it. For beliefs

are the framework upon which we do our thinking. Many present beliefs are the product of other times and other conditions useful then, perhaps, but possibly hampering now. When certain beliefs hinder the effective use of intelligence or hamper our adjustment to new conditions in a rapidly changing world, then more helpful beliefs become priceless and desirable even at the expense of some temporary loss of tranquility.

"The products of intellectual activity and scientific investigation are to be brought here, not the reiterations of uncritical views. On no other basic premise can a Frederick William Reynolds Lecture be true to its name or be even worthy of its name."

From introductory remarks by H.L. Marshall, late President of the Frederick William Reynolds Association, at the first annual lecture, December, 1936.

REFLECTIONS ON ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE, LEADERSHIP AND SOWS' EARS

by Harold H. Wolf  
Professor, Pharmacology and Toxicology  
University of Utah

The 51st Annual Frederick William Reynolds Lecture  
Delivered at the University of Utah  
May 1, 1990

## REFLECTIONS ON ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE, LEADERSHIP AND SOWS' EARS

Harold H. Wolf, Ph.D.  
Professor of Pharmacology and Toxicology

I am both honored and a bit intimidated by this opportunity to present the 51st Reynolds Lecture. Anyone who glances at the list of distinguished University faculty who have preceded me can easily relate to the honor it affords. The intimidation derives from the charge to the lecturer which asks that the topic chosen make available to the public some accomplishments in the speaker's field or the results of some distinctive body of knowledge. As a neuropharmacologist, I considered using this forum to describe our ongoing efforts and attendant outcomes in the discovery and development of novel drugs for the treatment of epilepsy. There is certainly much to say that I believe many would find interesting. Obviously, I've chosen to lead us on a very different intellectual voyage this evening. And I want to tell you how and why I decided to focus attention on a topic far removed from my scientific expertise, and yet one which has occupied a significant portion of my thoughts and attention for some 20 years.

Shortly after accepting this assignment, I left our campus for a brief sabbatical leave with the American Association of Colleges of Pharmacy where, as a Scholar in Residence, I could devote some uninterrupted time to chairing a national commission to implement change in pharmaceutical education. The Association is located in Alexandria, Virginia and masquerading as a scholar in the Washington area provided wonderful opportunities for reflection and contemplation while enjoying long walks along the Potomac. While I suspect that such activities are inherent in most sabbaticals, living in the nation's capital also provided additional, lengthy opportunities to contemplate the general state of academia, the nation and the universe as I sat amidst the inevitable gridlock and hostile cacophony which plagues the area's highways. However, while immobile

on the Beltway, I did discover how soothing it is to repeat the mantra, "Relax, you're on sabbatical, relax, you're on sabbatical."

As I framed an agenda for the Commission's work, I recognized that many of my thoughts and those of others in the group frequently revolved around issues of excellence and leadership. Indeed, any group with a sincere regard for the well-being of an academic enterprise is likely to share interest in and concern with such matters. Thus it seemed fitting to design this presentation around a topic which ensures a high level of audience attentiveness—at least at the outset.

While the advantages are obvious, there are some very real dangers. Most here this evening have read about, thought about, and discussed these matters in a host of formal and informal settings. Most have had innumerable dealings with the concept of excellence. At varying times, we've searched for it, designed strategies to attain it, promoted our successes in achieving it, and have lamented its loss. We have a similar familiarity with leadership. Some in this audience have had the responsibility to provide it, all have observed it, and, as in any university community, a few have honed their nonfollowing skills to a level which approximates an art form. As a result, the vast majority of you have firm opinions about these subjects and I harbor no delusions about my ability to produce radical changes in your views. I have done no scholarly research in this area, have no base of solid data to support my contentions and have never published a popular book on these subjects. What I bring to this forum is a sincere, long-standing commitment to the creation and sustenance of academic excellence and a range of mid-level, academic leadership experiences where I've labored to make this happen.

Finally, it will be apparent that I have as many questions to raise as I have answers to provide. In this regard, I offer no apology. Most of these questions defy single, simple answers. Moreover, as every educator knows, the artful use of questions can focus attention on matters which demand some action. Since you had prior access only to the title of my remarks, I believe that your presence offers support for the importance of directing such focused attention on issues surrounding academic excellence and the leadership necessary to create and nurture it. And that is what I intend to do.

In crafting these remarks, I have drawn liberally from observations made by John Gardner, Warren Bennis, Madeleine Green, Michael Cohen, James March, and others who have written extensively on leadership and excellence in and outside academia. In selecting from among their comments, I have made choices that reveal the fully ingrained biases and hard-held convictions that I've accumulated over the years.

Let us begin by considering excellence—what it is, how it is judged and why it is important. Certainly there are many varieties of excellence. There is intellectual excellence; excellence in music, art and sports; in statesmanship and craftsmanship; in designing famous dams and in damning infamous designs; and in an unending list of human endeavors, outcomes and experiences. Moreover, there are types of excellence that involve doing something well and types that involve being a certain kind of person. And, importantly, there is excellence that involves comparison between people and that which involves comparison between myself at my best and myself at my worst.<sup>1</sup> Amidst so many forms and varieties, how do we recognize it?

It seems appropriate to start with the thought that excellence, like beauty, is often in the eye

of the beholder. That which is deemed first class and highly meritorious by one person can readily be judged rather commonplace by another. We all recognize that the term has major subjective connotations and, as such, is strongly influenced by personal experience and expertise, individual expectations, and various types of cultural bias. For example, if I were to attend a heavy-metal rock concert in the company of several teenagers, I seriously doubt that we could agree on the excellence of the evening's entertainment. However, I'm equally convinced that similar disagreement could be found among the crowd leaving a symphony performance. Some may have judged the quality of the concert on the basis of the amount of technical precision displayed by the orchestra, while others may well have made a value judgment based on the number of times they were roused from peaceful slumber by the thundering of timpani—the fewer the awakenings, the greater the merit of the performance. The point being that although the term "excellence" is common in our daily conversations, frequently the standards which define the term are nonexistent or vary considerably, tend to be extremely subjective in nature, and often have little applicability beyond the world of advertising. Thus, we hear of unsurpassed excellence in the style of our clothing, the ride of our automobiles, and the palatability of our microwave dinners.

The situation seems only somewhat better in our universities. Certainly it is clear to all that "Wasatch State" has an excellent football team when its record shows only two losses over a three-year span, and when its archrival in the traditional annual game has made only five first downs over the past decade. And that may be enough for some to say that "Wasatch State" is an excellent university. But the matter is somewhat more complex when the merit of academic programs is to be judged. What components go into that equation? The

number of books in the library? Student/faculty ratios? Number of Nobel Laureates on campus? Quality of instruction? Contributions to economic development? Loyalty of alumni? Successes of the graduates? Size and appearance of the physical plant? Magnitude of the endowment fund? Amount of external, competitive funding? Quality and quantity of scholarly contributions? Column inches in national print media? I would suggest that all of these and numerous additional criteria contribute to establishing the "reputation" of a university which, in turn, permits individuals to feel comfortable in making judgments concerning excellence.

Let us recognize, however, that whereas standards for acceptable performance on the part of universities are available and are employed for accreditation purposes, standards for that amount of additional superior performance leading to a designation of excellent are far more vague and subjective. Moreover, since large universities accommodate numerous academic programs, each highly likely to vary in the quality of its effort, labeling one university adequate and another excellent should not be done without considerable trepidation. Nevertheless, most of us do this privately, if not publicly, and I suspect that there are some among us who would be quite willing to take this a step further and draw up a rank ordered list of the top 10 U.S. institutions of higher education which they consider academically excellent. Never mind that the population of institutions must encompass those like Reed College, whose primal mission is "... to develop in undergraduates the ability to be both analytical and compassionate ... to possess a tough mind and a soft heart";<sup>2</sup> and places like Rockefeller University with a professoriate of 50, a primal emphasis on research outcomes and the training of a maximum of 100 graduate students; and includes a multitude of private and public colleges and

universities which profess to embrace both ends of this mission spectrum. Never mind that excellence comparisons between institutions make little sense unless the comparisons are based on similar missions and we have reliable data which speak to outcomes and accomplishments. When we include an institution on such a list, it's most often there because of a passing familiarity with certain aspects of its reputation rather than an analysis of how well its accomplishments match its missions. In such situations, subjectivity is all we have. Well, not quite—for it says right here in the brochure from "Swiash U" that its tradition for academic excellence is unparalleled (or remains firm; or has been strengthened; or has been rediscovered). There is much truth in James Schmotter's observation that "American higher education may have failed to develop understandable measures of quality, but it has been successful in creating a public-relations machine that would make P.T. Barnum blush."<sup>3</sup> For these and many other reasons, I place little stock in the phrase "an academically excellent institution," especially when referring to universities.

Why is it that virtually all colleges and universities strive for excellence? There are many pragmatic reasons. Obviously, few are likely to enroll at an institution with a long tradition of searching for mediocrity. Additionally, we live in a society where limitations on resources for higher education are ubiquitous and where competition and selection are demanded to ensure a good return on investment. Perceived excellence plays a major role in such competition. There are also important philosophical reasons. As John Gardner observes, "Our society cannot achieve greatness unless individuals at many levels of ability accept the need for high standards of performance and strive to achieve these standards within the limits possible for them ... and society is bettered not only by those

who achieve (excellence) but by those who are trying."<sup>4</sup>

I have no quarrel with any institution's quest for excellence. I do wish that most would be a bit more circumspect before they claim to have captured it, skinned it, and tacked it to the wall of the Alumni House. I am also troubled when surface symbols of excellence are perverted to enhance the perception that an institution has achieved excellence without demonstrating attendant improvement in academic quality. For example, there is a national and local trend to rename colleges as universities. In commenting on the rationale for such a change, proponents argued that a major factor was the status of the term "University" in making the diploma more saleable. While there are certainly sound reasons for renaming academic institutions, I'm not convinced this is one. Do potential employers really believe that the 1990 graduates of "Western Zion University" will be capable of far better performance than were the 1989 graduates of "The College of Western Zion?" I think not. The basic problem with cosmetic approaches to excellence is that they tend to confuse illusion with reality. Unfortunately, a comfortable illusion is often preferred to disquieting reality. Thus, it is all too easy to be satisfied with the illusion and never expend the effort to deal constructively with the reality.

Problems in identifying academic excellence are not always so vexing. Indeed most faculty probably feel that they can readily identify those centers of excellence which specifically relate to their scientific, humanistic, or professional disciplines. Thus, if I were to ask 50 faculty in the relatively small field of pharmaceuticals, from 50 different colleges of pharmacy, to compile a list of those six departments which they believe produce excellent outcomes in pharmaceuticals, I believe that every individual could do this easily and comfortably.

Moreover, I suspect that there would be rather close agreement for those centers of excellence so identified—as long as I didn't ask for a rank ordering. A high degree of response homogeneity should not be surprising, for the standards of excellence utilized by such faculty are likely to be similar and probably would include number and reputation of faculty, recent contributions to the discipline's knowledge base, amount of external funding, size of the graduate program, placement and accomplishments of graduates, space and research instrumentation available, etc. I further suspect that, within comprehensive universities, faculty from a wide range of fields could compile similar lists for their discipline with similar good agreement. While the specific indicators of excellence may vary from field to field, I believe that what constitutes academic excellence is well understood by those laboring within a discipline.

On the other hand, if these very same individuals were asked to make comparative value judgments about the excellence of the college which houses their discipline, I believe their responses would demonstrate far more heterogeneity based upon less clear, certainly more subjective, and even conflicting notions of the standards to be used. Thus the question arises, is it a reasonable expectation, in comprehensive universities, that colleges achieve academic excellence? And if the expectation is reasonable, what are the critical components and resources necessary to engender such excellence? It is into these muddy waters that I wish to steer my next comments, recognizing that, in doing so, I risk exposing my own naked bias and subjectivity. My objective is to direct some collective thought to the issues involved and, if this occurs, I will consider the benefits fully worth the risk.

Let me emphasize that my remarks relate to colleges in comprehensive universities like the

University of Utah, *i.e.*, institutions that educate and train undergraduates, doctoral-level graduate students, as well as professional students and profess a serious commitment to scholarship, research and other creative endeavors. While an aspiration for academic excellence is both reasonable and commendable in such colleges, I believe its attainment is likely to require the presence of at least six critical components. Some are tangible and easily identified, while others are attitudinal and less readily subject to precise measurement.

An initial, fundamental requirement is a clear exposition of college goals and objectives which states what the college *intends* to do—not just what it *wants* to do. A statement of mission which describes explicitly and unambiguously the programs, functions, and responsibilities that the college is willing to undertake is necessary for several reasons. First, it is needed to chart the course for future actions and help establish priorities for the allocation of limited resources. Additionally, it permits those in the institution to direct and coordinate their efforts in ways congruent with such goals and enables those outside the institution to be more realistic in what should be expected from the college. Finally, this provides the impartial observer with a necessary baseline and increases the probability that appropriate outcomes will be examined in evaluating the quality of the enterprise. Without such information, it is most difficult to judge where a college is headed and quite impossible to state that it has arrived.

Obviously, statements of this type can only be meaningful if they are products of considerable faculty input and acceptance and reflect to a reasonable degree the expectations of those constituencies served by the college. It is also important that when such statements speak to excellence, they consider the frame

of reference to be applied. For example, most everyone agrees that Will Clark of the San Francisco Giants represents excellence—but what about the Trappers' first baseman who bats .400? The game is the same, but the league is very different. In crafting mission statements, it is indeed important to know the level and nature of your academic league.

When we, at this university, speak of excellence, is our frame of reference national in scope? Or is it directed toward state-wide preeminence, distinction along the Wasatch Front, or simply, to be the best between Mill Creek and the Jordan River? If we embrace national standards of excellence, do our attitudes and behaviors match our expectations? Does the persistence of our commitment match the flower of our rhetoric? And, importantly, how do we react when our expectations appear incongruent with those of the citizenry whose tax dollars are important to our endeavors? Do we revise our frame of reference and seek refuge in a different league?

Finally, it would be most inappropriate to expect all colleges to design universally applicable mission statements. For it is unnecessary, unrealistic and unwise for every college to have stated goals and objectives which encompass all academic functions and activities that the parent university espouses in its detailed statement of purpose. As a single example, how could any university afford to commit resources to the development of nationally recognized centers of research excellence in all of its science departments? In the final analysis, the achievement of institutional excellence, at college and university levels, is less likely to be dependent on the number of goals being pursued and more dependent on demonstrated success in accomplishing, with distinction, a limited set of objectives.

Few would disagree that adequate resources

are also necessary for the generation and perpetuation of academic excellence. My own view of required resources extends beyond physical facilities, equipment inventories and budgetary totals and includes students and faculty. Indeed, as Warren Bennis reminds us "... the only capital that really counts is human capital."<sup>5</sup> With a critical mass of competent, dedicated and motivated faculty, excellence may be a realistic expectation for any college. Without this resource, it is an impossible dream. Similarly, student quality must be a vital part of the resource equation.

This university and its colleges have experienced a dreadfully long period of fiscal hardship which is of grave concern to all of us. How we respond will say much about the true frame of reference for our commitment to academic excellence.

Several years ago we upgraded our admission standards to improve the quality of entering students, thereby enhancing both their learning opportunities and the probability that they will successfully complete their chosen course of study. As a result of the more egalitarian sentiments of our friends, neighbors and the legislature, that portion of our budget derived from state funds has suffered. A pragmatic response would be to revert to more lenient admission standards—and perhaps we must do this. But as part of this discussion we should ask ourselves how this may impact the visions of excellence we seek. Are our visions still national in scope or are our horizons limited by the mountains that surround us? Are we ready to join a different academic league? Our inability to provide nationally competitive salaries to our faculty represents another consequence of inadequate state support. When we endorse arguments and accept the rationalization that this disparity in faculty salaries is no worse than that felt by other wage earners state-wide, perhaps the franchise has already

been transferred.

In most discussions of academic excellence, issues of adequacy of support tend to dominate. As a fledgling administrator, I took to heart Eugene O'Neill's admonition that "You can't build a marble temple from a mixture of mud and manure." As a more seasoned administrator, I disregarded that advice and went about building. And I only became really testy when I had to take cuts in the amount of mud in the mixture.

A third critical component relates to the emphasis given in our varied endeavors to the processes of teaching and learning. We have yet to master and widely apply mechanisms that will improve the level of active student involvement in the learning process. We still struggle to find reliable procedures whereby students learn to integrate and apply existing knowledge from diverse fields in the reality of problem solving. We recognize the urgent need to improve markedly both verbal and written communication skills but all too often fail to recognize that the development of these attributes requires practice, constructive criticism and significant amounts of individual attention and faculty effort. And colleagues willing to expend such effort seldom receive appropriate admiration and other benefits commensurate to their successes. What importance do we place on training students to analyze critically new ideas or think anew about familiar concepts; on instilling in those we teach a love for raising questions and an appropriate disdain for overly pat answers; on creating a learning environment characterized by motivation for ongoing discovery which perseveres with a bright intensity; and on fostering in our graduates a retrospective conviction that the real worth of education in our colleges was its long-term, positive impact on their ability to approximate their potential? Do we truly value such outcomes and the

professoriate that catalyzes them? Where do peers and others usually rank such faculty in the continuum of academic excellence among individuals? Where should they rank? These are some of the issues which colleges must address as they strive for excellence in their educational programs.

Another component is the presence of a tangible commitment to scholarship, creative work, and research. Indeed, this is an absolute prerequisite for institutional excellence. While colleges in comprehensive universities have a clear responsibility to provide worthwhile and meaningful learning experiences for students, they have an equivalent responsibility to expand the base of existing knowledge and make these new truths known to a society which depends on such activities to meet current and future challenges. Moreover, in most situations, teaching endeavors and the processes of creative work and discovery are mutually reinforcing.

A logical extension of this commitment is the selected development of strong graduate programs in those disciplines in which a critical mass of competent faculty exist, along with the physical and fiscal resources required to mount a quality effort. As a corollary, graduate programs should not be started nor continued in those institutions where resources, human and otherwise, are simply insufficient to justify graduate training as an appropriate mission of the college. While superb graduate programs contribute mightily to a college's excellent reputation, a single substandard program can do great harm.

A fifth critical component in my equation for college excellence is an academic environment that promotes the concept that each of us is capable of much additional progress toward individual excellence and that supports this concept visibly and consistently. Daniel

Yankelovich informs us that fewer than 25% of workers say that they work at full potential, and about 60% believe that they do not work as hard as they once did. Roughly 75% say that they could be significantly more effective than they are now.<sup>6</sup> How many of us in academic posts have maximized our potential for excellence? How much progress toward institutional excellence would occur if only a portion of such additional individual potential were achieved? Why do we frequently assume that the quickest and surest path to excellence is to recruit the best and brightest from distant academic pastures while doing relatively little to retain those productively cultivating the intellectual fields in our own back forty—all the while forgetting that, just a short time ago, these very individuals were the objects of our intense affection and recruitment efforts? Why is it relatively easy to generate enthusiasm and resources to attract outstanding individuals to join our ranks and, yet, so difficult to generate similar enthusiasm for their subsequent successes? In academia does familiarity breed complacency rather than contempt? Why is there universal excitement for creating excellence and so little passion for sustaining and building upon that clearly present, and for designing and implementing strategies to maximize the unrealized potential inherent in all of us?

Finally, I have long been convinced that excellence in our colleges and universities cannot be attained without strong, creative and effective leadership. Without individual excellence, institutional excellence cannot occur. But the excellence of individuals, while essential, is never sufficient if leadership is deficient. Before proceeding, it is essential to acknowledge that leadership is not the only indicator of good academic administration. Indeed successful administration frequently depends on appropriate attention to a large number of mundane efforts that are often dismissed as mere

bureaucratic management but are quickly recognized as important when they are not performed well. However, leadership is the key and therefore deserves the remainder of our attention.

Those who study contemporary American society lament the paucity of effective leadership in business, government and academia and suggest that new models of leadership are required.<sup>7,8,9</sup> Our bookstores are filled with far-ranging observation, comment and instruction on this matter. Thus, while there may be a short supply of good leaders, there is a plethora of advice for those who hold leadership positions and those who aspire to such posts. My remarks are focused on academic leadership and, for the most part, limited to four issues: envisioning goals, creating community, leading in an organized anarchy, and letting go.

Academic leaders are commonly expected to have a vision for their institution—a vision that leads to clear-cut and measurable goals. They must clearly communicate that vision and their intentions concerning it; must display a focused commitment to that vision; and must exhibit consistent behavior toward the goals envisioned.

Not uncommonly, leaders of academic institutions have visions of creating numerous programs which have qualities reminiscent of the literary silk purse, *i.e.*, prized for their elegance and uniqueness. Unfortunately, some such institutions exist in environments unalterably hostile to nurturing silkworms and economically incapable of securing very much of the essential raw material. Thus the amount of silk on hand never seems to be enough to create programmatic silk purses of the size and number envisioned. However, the environment may well be one in which pigs thrive. And each one has two ears. Thus the problem

seems fairly clear. How can what is readily at hand be used to produce what is avidly desired?

Over the years, I've become convinced that it is terribly difficult to transform sows' ears into silk. Many try but few succeed. The mechanism to convert pig dermis into silk remains elusive and, like converting base metals into gold, cannot be reproduced at will. Moreover, all published claims of success also report that the process involves a dynamic equilibrium which, unfortunately, favors pig. If one is sincerely committed to making silk purses, but has a limited amount of silk, it seems more reasonable to downsize expectations about the numbers to be produced. However, if one wants to make a purse, where is the shame in using pigskin? It has a number of endearing qualities that would recommend it—especially if silk is not attainable. It is rugged, durable, and does not display any effete-like Eastern affectations. The product is different, but is it necessarily less excellent? A greater shame lies in ignoring large parts of a potentially valuable existing resource which could be used to make pig pokes. But the greatest shame would be to divert effort and energy to convince others and delude oneself that porcine purses are indistinguishable from silk ones.

John Gardner makes a most cogent point when he comments that, "Although some tasks of leadership can be delegated, envisioning goals is not one of them. Unless a leader has a sense of where an organization is going and should go, little noteworthy progress is likely."<sup>10</sup>

Most who labor to provide academic leadership strive to create a sense of community, *i.e.*, a framework of shared values within which there is a productive balance between individuality and group obligation. The ability to do this well is one hallmark of an effective leader

in that this attitude and the behaviors fostered can help to catalyze excellence in various academic missions. I have been very fortunate to have participated in numerous situations where a sense of community existed, e.g., large-group, collaborative research efforts; the creation of a new department; the development of a new college; and leading an established college during a period of dynamic growth. It is indeed exciting, highly stimulating and great fun. I have also had experiences from which I've learned that sustaining a sense of academic community can be very difficult. Let me briefly share one such experience.

Some 20 years ago, I had the responsibility to teach pharmacy students at The Ohio State University about the pharmacology of drugs acting within the central nervous system. This instruction was part of a year-long, pharmacology course sequence. My course had a prerequisite requirement of several courses in the college's Division of Medicinal Chemistry to enhance the probability that students would understand the chemical nature of the agents discussed, would more readily grasp the biological effects of existing drugs, and could subsequently apply the principles learned to master the pharmacology of new therapeutic entities they would encounter during some four decades of professional practice. Since those teaching pharmacology enjoyed collaborative research relationships with our colleagues in medicinal chemistry, it was natural to compare notes on our teaching efforts and outcomes. These discussions illuminated two common problems: the students retained little of what had been taught in medicinal chemistry and evidenced little ability to use that retained in furthering their understanding of pharmacology.

The solution seemed obvious and was deceptively simple—combine the essential material in these separate disciplinary offerings into a

fully integrated, multidisciplinary sequence of courses. And, importantly, design test instruments which required students to master basic principles from both disciplines to solve problems likely to occur in the reality of evolving professional practice. As is easily imagined, deceptively simple became pragmatically tortuous. The inevitable issues of what is really essential knowledge for pharmacy practice, disciplinary defense of curricular turf, and the inalienable right of individual faculty to control curricular content all demanded attention and resolution prior to proceeding. I like to believe that the commitment that a medicinal chemistry colleague and I brought to this endeavor as chairmen of our respective divisions helped to move this forward, albeit at a seemingly glacial speed. Nevertheless, after discussion and debate at all levels including faculty of both divisions, college curriculum committee, college executive committee, and university curriculum committee, we initiated this new offering.

The results were gratifying and, at times, surprising. Our students enjoyed this approach, were more inclined to participate in classroom discussions, were more actively involved in the learning process, and demonstrated better understanding of concepts from both disciplines. A marked improvement in student ratings of teaching effectiveness also occurred. Additionally, however, faculty from both divisions now spent significantly more time with one another—initially focused on resolving course-related issues and fine-tuning the offering, but subsequently directed to a host of other matters. We became more conversant with the research expertise of our colleagues, conceived new research initiatives requiring additional collaboration, and became more productive scientists. Thus the scholarship improved in both divisions. Moreover, other colleges soon began to utilize this teaching approach which brought some positive

national recognition to the divisions and the college. Finally the endeavor helped to create some long-standing personal friendships among the faculty involved.

Thus a community of interest was created. And it was good. But it did not last. It was clear from the outset that success required the presence of some faculty from both disciplines at all lecture and discussion sessions. Moreover, since faculty were most comfortable within a narrow range of expertise, *e.g.*, the cardiovascular system, large numbers of instructors were involved. This required careful attention to coordination and the expenditure of large amounts of individual faculty time and energy. Some of this was of great value. For example, it is amazing how most of us can markedly improve our classroom skills when four faculty peers are sitting in the back row. However, over time there was an erosion of faculty commitment to this effort and, after several years, the approach was shelved at Ohio State and at most other universities.

Why was this teaching and learning technique abandoned when it was meeting the instructional goals of both divisions, facilitating the attainment of other important missions, and had the uniform support of students? In reflection, two major reasons come to mind. First, faculty came to believe that the considerable effort involved was inappropriate to their career goals. And the traditional university reward system did little to mitigate this concern. They recognized, correctly, that their advancement depended far more on that which could be easily identified as individual achievement than that which was part of a group effort. Although the more traditional benefits of research productivity and outcomes were being accrued indirectly, the link to a sense of community was not readily apparent. It was also not apparent that there was a link

between their active participation in building that community and their perceived value as academicians. Additionally, and perhaps of greater importance, the ever-present, powerful sway of disciplinary allegiance nipped constantly at and eventually weakened the roots of the community. Indeed, during the latter years of this effort, the most common faculty concerns related to lack of distinct disciplinary identification for the sequence of courses. The litany included—Is the division losing student credit hours and attendant budget by this approach? What can I say to my colleagues at next year's annual meeting when they ask why our college thinks so poorly of medicinal chemistry (or pharmacology) that they have eliminated our previously required courses from the curriculum? How can we use these interdisciplinary courses to attract graduate students to our division when our disciplinary distinctiveness has been so crippled? I found the latter query particularly bemusing since the courses involved represented a small part of each division's overall teaching responsibilities and the students had enrolled to gain help in preparing themselves for a professional career in pharmacy.

This experience was instructive in a number of ways. I came to understand, first-hand, the valuable role that a sense of community plays in fostering the development of excellence in academic units, and that leadership is indeed needed to help make this happen. I also learned that those in the academic trenches often have less than a global view of the benefits obtained. Moreover, I developed a healthy respect for the power of unrestrained, disciplinary chauvinism to detract from the viability of real community, especially when arguments are raised about the survival of the species. As a tangential benefit, the experience provoked a dawning appreciation of those faculty expectations of leadership that have been succinctly summarized as, "Love me, lead

me and leave me alone."<sup>11</sup> Thus, while I remain convinced that academic leaders must conceive and articulate organizational goals in ways that lift faculty above their disciplinary concerns and motivate them toward broader institutional goals, the task is formidable.

Several years ago, Michael Cohen and James March published an eminently readable little volume which provides some interesting insights concerning leadership and ambiguity, particularly in the context of the role of college presidents.<sup>12</sup> A central thesis of the book is that academic leadership is far less a product of straightforward instrumental action and official control than is frequently perceived by most external and internal to the university. Indeed there is a common image that presidents and others with line responsibility for academic units are central in determining directions for the institution or unit and for implementing these directions through decision and negotiation. The authors make a strong case that these heroic visions of leadership, even though they may be embraced by administrators and their constituents, may not reflect reality. Against these visions of heroic leadership, colleges are described as organized anarchies and their leadership as constrained by ambiguities of objectives, technologies and experience. It is a world in which both problems and solutions are only loosely coupled with decisions and decision processes. Although the focus of this book is clearly on college presidents, I believe that much of what they say has direct relevance for deans and department chairs.

The authors observe that effective top executives are indeed heroic—but their heroism lies not in their ability to lead their institutions to a pre-chosen destiny nor in their responsibility for the major successes or failures realized by their institutions, but in their willingness to try to do better in a world where

neither the meaning of "better" nor the route to its realization is crystal clear. Thus it seems that the most one can reasonably expect from a president is a broad vision of where the overall institution should be heading, clear and consistent enunciation of why the voyage is important, and a rough compass direction. On the other hand, I believe that deans should be able to provide their colleges with at least a functional road map with major highways delineated, and department chairs a topographical chart which facilitates navigating the immediate terrain and permits detours to be made in the face of major obstacles.

Why is traditional leadership so elusive in our universities? Cohen and March help us understand this by viewing our colleges and universities as organized anarchies which exhibit the following characteristics:

The organization's goals are problematic in that it appears to operate on a variety of inconsistent and ill defined preferences. Indeed it discovers preferences through action more often than it acts on the basis of preferences.

The organization's technology is unclear in that, even though it manages to survive and be productive, it does not understand its own processes. It operates on the basis of a simple set of trial and error procedures, the residue of learning from the accidents of past experiences, imitation, and the inventions born of necessity.

Participants in the organization are extremely fluid in that they vary from one time to another and vary among themselves in the amount of time and effort they are willing to contribute to organizational tasks.<sup>13</sup>

Within such a framework, I find it hardly

surprising that academic organizations have a hard time coming to grips with decisions about what the institution wants to do, its priorities among the scope of its stated missions, and the specific plans it will employ to reach its goals. I also find Cohen and March convincing in their view that, as a system for making planning decisions, standard university-wide governance procedures are open to a number of vital challenges. It is not clear that such systems have a major role in the outcomes of decisions; that anyone seriously wanted them to have such a role, or that the systems are constituted in a way to make such a role feasible. However, these systems do provide forums for validating status. And for many, the process and structure of university governance are more important than the outcome. Participation is not a means but an end. Let me illustrate with a single example.

Recently I had dinner with a faculty friend from another university. In our conversation she spoke enthusiastically about recent gains made by those in her department who have traditionally held clinical track appointments and have felt the frustration of second-class academic citizenship. I asked about the improvements. Did they involve tenure or long-term appointments? No. Sabbatical opportunity? No. Access to restricted funding? No. The totality of the gains involved the opportunity to participate in committees and general debates of the Academic Senate. And yet, unless their Senate is radically different from others, I suspect that these newly gained rights of participation will have little impact on the university's future direction.

Many among us have spent a portion of our academic careers in leadership positions. When we accepted such posts, most of us probably had a vision of ourselves functioning as a heroic leader. This vision may have involved a clear-cut sense of what was needed to make

our enterprise better; confidence in our ability to convince others of both the righteousness of our cause and the evident pathways to achievement; trust in our ability to overcome significant odds against success; and an anticipation that the world, or at least a microcosm, would clearly recognize the pivotal role we played in bringing this to fruition.

Long ago I became convinced that this type of heroic leadership within academia is largely mythical. Presidents may make global statements and issue calls for action which indeed are needed to help shape the tone and ambience of an institution. However, while undeniably important, these are, *per se*, unlikely to have a long-lasting effect on shaping the destiny of the institution. Deans may promulgate their vision of a better future for their college and may provide a moderately detailed road map for that future. While movement toward such horizons may be facilitated by the dean's ability to recruit department chairs and faculty with complementary visions and critical talents required for implementation, sustained progress is likely to be inhibited by the decision-making constraints present in any organized anarchy. It is at the department level that the most direct connections between leadership and organizational outcomes can be seen. It is here that one can readily accept comments such as, "Professor Jones really turned that place around" or, "Since Sally Black took the chair, that department has really made a name for itself." Recognition of the direct link between departmental success and leadership should not be surprising. At this level of academic organization there should be more homogeneity, greater understanding of the processes that lead to success, and a more readily achieved consensus on goals and objectives. Thus the leadership required may be somewhat less than "heroic." This does not mean that it is any less important. Indeed, the greatness of any university rests ultimately on

the excellence present within individual departments.

While their comment is a bit sexist, I particularly like the observation of Cohen and March that "The president is a bit like the driver of a skidding automobile. The marginal judgments he makes, his skill, and his luck may possibly make some difference to the survival prospects for his riders. As a result, his responsibilities are heavy. But whether he is convicted of manslaughter or receives a medal for heroism is largely outside his control."<sup>14</sup> In a similar vein, a dean may be considered responsible for providing navigation to a heavily laden barge with a tiller that is not terribly responsive and where the direction may depend as much on tides, winds and currents that are often unpredictable, never under his/her control, and yet at certain times can be used to help navigate a desired course. Because the level of anarchy should be considerably less in a department, the leadership of those who chair may be likened to steering a canoe. While uncontrollable winds, currents or tides may certainly impede progress and may even swamp or sink the vessel, the unit can be fairly responsive to efforts to alter its current course and seek alternative routes to a desired destination.

It is important to recognize that all leadership is perishable. While that characterized by lack of vision, indecision and inconsistency is more perishable than that identified with far-reaching vision, decisiveness and consistency, the time comes when every leader loses effectiveness. For a host of reasons, leaders find their creative energy burned down, their patience burned out, and their credibility burned up. Visions of the future get lost in crises of the moment; planning becomes far less important to doing; reorganization of the process to address sticky problems becomes equated with problem resolution; energy is

directed to the routine and mundane rather than to the creative and risky; and voices of dissent are increasingly viewed as part of the problem rather than as constructive advocates for needed change. It may have been John Gardner who expressed the thought that the first and last task of a leader is to keep hope alive. While fully endorsing that sentiment, I also agree with H.G. Wells, who said, "Leaders should lead as far as they can and then vanish. Their ashes should not choke the fire they have lit."<sup>15</sup> Thus, perhaps the last, best task of a leader is to recognize and acknowledge the time when it is appropriate to relinquish the mantle of leadership. I believe that most sense when that time is at hand. However, their willingness to act on this intuition may be limited by pragmatic, personal concerns for their future career. At all levels, academic leadership is a tough, demanding and consuming activity. And no one should really *need* the job more than they *want* it.

There are numerous examples of individuals who have continued to pursue highly productive and fully satisfying academic careers after completing periods of service where the demands of leadership and management were very great. I suspect that most such individuals undertook their leadership posts with the view that this was to be a part of their career and not the totality of it, that there indeed was life after leadership, and that it was thus essential to maintain their skills as both effective teachers and respected scholars. I also suspect that the quality of leadership benefits from attitudes reflecting the belief that academic life has a lot of chapters, of which positions of leadership are but one.

Let me close with two additional comments about excellence and leadership. Several times this evening I have used sports metaphors to make a point about academic excellence. I have done this because in sports there is clear,

prevalent relationship between winning and excellence. We have a few champions and a multitude of also-rans; we have winners and losers; and we associate excellence with the former and mediocrity with the latter. In all such situations, the comparisons involve competition between groups or individuals with little regard for the comparison of myself at my worst with myself at my best. We have carried this mindset and its accompanying metaphors into all aspects of contemporary society, including academia. Thus we talk of our "track record" in competing for external funding; of recruiting a "heavy hitter" in quantum mechanics; of developing a "major league" department of anthropology; and of "winning" any number of academic prizes. Without ignoring the benefits of such outcomes in fostering academic excellence, or arguing for a different metaphor, I'd ask if there are not other views of excellence which deserve equal admiration. Professor D. Stanley Eitzen of Colorado State University, in commenting on the dark side of competition in American society, makes a good case for a more individualistic approach in determining the achievement of excellence. He also reminds us that winning is seldom important to the perception and reality of our personal excellence. He does this by describing a 200 meter race among three evenly matched 12-year olds at a Special Olympics event. About 25 yards from the finish line, one of the contestants fell. The other two runners stopped and helped their competitor to his feet, brushed him off, and jogged together hand in hand to the finish line, ending the race in a three-way tie.<sup>16</sup> Like Professor Eitzen, I believe there are important lessons in this poignant story for all of us so enmeshed in the competitive quest for excellence. At the very least, such events should remind us that collaboration and commitment to creating a sense of community can reinforce important humane values—values that are sorely needed in an academic world increasingly populated

by competitors and contenders.

One of the personal benefits of a presentation like this is the opportunity it presents for reflection on how one's convictions concerning academic excellence and leadership change over time. At an earlier age, when my fervent belief in heroic leadership was unshakable, I often quoted the adage that, "If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there." Now that I've completed the administrative phase of my career, I embrace a somewhat different philosophy. While I continue to believe passionately that academic leaders must know and communicate where their organization should go, I have come to realize that, given the ambiguities inherent to the organized anarchy of academia, you can't always be certain where you are going. In such situations, I suggest that leaders take the high road—the path that is congruent with your sense of what is ideal. This approach has at least three advantages. It enables you to stay out of the swamp; you have a better chance of seeing alternative routes; and, even if you never reach your desired goal, the view is grand and the voyage is likely to be psychologically satisfying. There was also a time when I thought of just one or two roads to personal and institutional excellence. Although the excellence I sought always seemed to be beyond the horizon, I envisioned highways that were fairly straight with sign posts that were clearly visible and easy to follow. I've now traveled many a mile on this venture and have a broader perspective of the scope and nature of academic excellence and believe there are many roads to get there. I've also observed that the highways and byways are seldom smooth and the sign posts can easily mislead the unwary. I've learned that there are perilous twists and turns which, if negotiated at reckless speed, can lead to disaster. And I've experienced the common optical illusion of uphill progress while, in reality, the enterprise was

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going downhill—sometimes at an alarming rate. Nonetheless, I remain firmly optimistic that excellence does indeed lie over the next horizon or, at worst, the one after that. And if subsequent events prove me wrong, I'll have

few regrets. For in the final analysis, I've come to believe that active involvement in planning for and taking the trip is more important and personally rewarding than is the eventual destination.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> John W. Gardner, *Excellence—Can We Be Equal and Excellent Too?* (Harper & Row: New York, 1961).

<sup>2</sup> Attributed to President Paul Bragdon in personal correspondence from William Naito, 1985.

<sup>3</sup> James W. Schmotter, *Colleges Have Themselves to Blame for the Influence of Journalistic Rankings on Their Quality*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 16, 1989.

<sup>4</sup> Gardner, *Excellence* . . .

<sup>5</sup> Warren Bennis, *Why Leaders Can't Lead—The Unconscious Conspiracy Continues* (Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, 1989).

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Yankelovich, *Work and Human Values* (Public Agenda Foundation: New York, 1983).

<sup>7</sup> John W. Gardner, *On Leadership* (Free Press: New York, 1990).

<sup>8</sup> Bennis, *Why Leaders Can't Lead* . . .

<sup>9</sup> Madeline F. Green, *Leaders for a New Era* (American Council on Education /Macmillan: New York, 1988).

<sup>10</sup> Gardner, *On Leadership* . . .

<sup>11</sup> Judith S. Eaton, *Love Me, Lead Me, and Leave Me Alone*; in *Leaders on Leadership: The College Presidency*; J.L. Fisher and M.W. Tack, eds. *New Directions for Higher Education*, no. 61 (Jossey-Bass: San Francisco, 1988).

<sup>12</sup> Michael D. Cohen and James G. March, *Leadership and Ambiguity*, 2nd edition (Harvard Business School Press: Cambridge, 1986).

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*

<sup>14</sup> *ibid*

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Gardner, *On Leadership* . . .

<sup>16</sup> D. Stanley Eitzen, *The Dark Side of Competition in American Society*, speech delivered at Bethel College, Kansas, September 25, 1989.

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